



## Journal of Communication and Cultural Trends (JCCT)

Volume 3 Issue 1, Spring 2021

ISSN<sub>(P)</sub>: 2706-9141 ISSN<sub>(E)</sub>: 2706-915X

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jcct>

Issue DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jcct.31>

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/jcct/Home>

Article:

### Impact of Netspeak on the Writing Skills of Generation X and Y

[Journal QR](#)

Author(s):

Rameen Tahir, Fiza Hassan



Affiliations

Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan

[Article QR](#)

Pub. Online:

Spring 2021



Article DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.32350/jcct.31.03>



Article History:

Received: Oct 20, 2020

Revised: Mar 17, 2021

Accepted: Mar 18, 2021

[Indexing](#)

To cite this article:

Tahir, R., & Hassan, F. (2021). Impact of netspeak on the writing skills of generation X and Y. *Journal of Communication and Cultural Trends*, 3(1), 31–53.

[Crossref](#)



Copyright Information

This article is open access and is distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.



A publication of the  
Institute of Communication and Cultural Studies  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

# **Impact of Netspeak on the Writing Skills of Generation X and Generation Y**

Rameen Tahir\* and Fiza Hassan

Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan

## **Abstract**

This research focuses on the impact of netspeak on the formal writing skills of the users. It is labelled as the hub of slang and informal language content by many experts. The current analysis accounts for five objectives including the identification of the prime causative factors responsible for deviation in the use of the standard variety, the appliance of the impact of Netspeak on formal writing, the nature of its impact (positive or negative), the assessment of its impact with reference to age and on the basis of the kind of response netspeak receives from the living generations, determining its sustainability. The objectives are attained through a questionnaire, collecting responses from the individuals belonging to Generation X and Generation Y. This study proposes that the influence of mother tongue and code switching are the prime causative factors of netspeak. The research further showcases the impact of the electronic variety on the users' formal writing skills which can disturb their formal linguistic framework; however, the variety on its own has been indicated previously as a handy tool for the users. Focusing on the factor of age neutrality, the current study suggests that although Generation X is more inclined towards the use of the standard variety, yet it remains quite open-minded towards the existence and usage of the new variety on social media, stating it to be a "feature of the progressive world". The research reflects the enthralling nature of netspeak which has massively contributed to its popularity. It was inferred that neither the platform (the digital world) is losing its power nor the users are in the mood of giving up on it in the near future. It can be said that it's a budding variety for the people by the people, born to live, thus strengthening the sustainability argument.

**Keywords:** Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), Generation X, Generation Y, Language 1 (L1), Language 2 (L2), millennial, netspeak

## **Introduction**

### **Background**

Technology in its progress is paralleling time. With every passing day, it is achieving a new milestone never witnessed before in history. The invention of electronic gadgets /along with the invention of the internet and thousands of social

---

\*Corresponding Author: [rameentahir498@gmail.com](mailto:rameentahir498@gmail.com)

media applications has allowed technology to be a part of the everyday life of a common person through online education, marketing, online shopping, bookings, web entertainment industry, gaming and via chatting over a distance of thousands of miles. "Since its launch in 2004, Facebook has grown to 175 million active users by the year 2009. Furthermore, according to Facebook company info, the number of daily users that engaged in the sites' services during December 2016 reached 1.23 billion on average, with 85.2% of activities taking place outside North America. Instagram services reached 700 million active users in April 2017 since starting its' services in 2010, with 80% of those users being outside the U.S.A." (Jimma, [2017](#)). Such a vast number of people interacting and interchanging information at a single platform calls for a single language which was set to be English, the global lingua franca. Just as the spread of English in the world has altered its structure leading to its new varieties, the English used over the internet has gone through a similar process over the years, caused by the users coming from different linguistic backgrounds. This has created a new variety of English known as the netspeak, which possesses quite distinctive features compared to the standard variety and remains particularly informal in its nature.

Careful analysis of different social media sites such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook shows a clear picture of the use of netspeak characterized by an amalgam of different linguistic contractions, reductions, acronyms, overstatement of punctuation, improper and abrupt capitalizations, emoticons, slangs and other such features. Starting from *Y'all* for you all, *ryt* for right, *B4* for before, *Np* for no problem, and *hahaha* to express laughter, the variety has turned out to be /rich. It was also observed that netspeak has no strings attached to it as nobody can claim it; therefore, every nation / region has given its own color to it, such as the use of Roman Urdu and Urdu slangs in netspeak in the Pakistani context. Examples include *scene on hai, golibaz, and paindu*. Many other researchers support the idea that modification in terms of punctuation, grammar and vocabulary is inevitable when modern technology is integrated with language (Zinkhan et al., [2003](#); Stavfeldt, [2011](#)).

An important reason behind the various features of netspeak, found by the current researcher, was to achieve the flavor of real-time spoken discourse in written chats. The aim was to depict the features of spoken discourse in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) such as tone, pitch, expressions and emotions in order to convey the right meaning. Netspeak is, therefore, "viewed as a novel medium, combining spoken, written and electronic properties" (Crystal, [2002](#)). The question whether CMC belongs to the written or the spoken category was put forth in the previous century. Ferrara, Brunner and Whittemore were among the first to

discuss this issue. These authors called it “real-time interactive written discourse” (Jovanovic, [2013](#)). They were affiliated with the Human Interface Laboratory, Austin, Texas. They addressed this issue in 1991 in their research stating that “Netspeak is more than an aggregate of spoken and written features. It does things that neither of these other mediums do, and must accordingly be seen as a new species of communication” (Crystal, [2002](#)). This is why it is also labelled as the “electronic discourse” (Watt, [2010](#)).

Despite the ignition of a meaningful debate among the experts “there are also debates which mirror scholarly worry over the influence of Netspeak on students’ literacy” (O’Connor, [2005](#)) (Shaughnessy, [2008](#)). “Some have the understanding that the so-called ‘Internet English’ is a breakdown of the English language” (Thangaraj, [2015](#)).

### **Aims and Objectives**

1. What are the main factors /responsible for the deviations in the use of the standard language leading to the emergence of netspeak?
2. How does netspeak affect the formal writing skills of the youth? Does it disturb their academic variety of English?
3. What is the sustainability of netspeak?
4. What is the ratio of the positive and negative impact of CMC on users? Can it be fully inclined towards one pole?
5. Netspeak is generally associated with the younger generation, it would be interesting to find whether this particular case of netspeak is age neutral or not?
6. Whether or not duration (years) impacts the amount of netspeak one uses while communicating in formal and informal environment?

### **Purpose / Significance**

This research highlights the concerns regarding the evolution of netspeak and the risks it poses for the standard variety. It will help to reduce the ambiguity about the dominant impact (positive or negative) of CMC on the users. Moreover, it will help to understand whether netspeak has the power to become a globally recognized variety of English or is it just another kind of pidgin language which does not have a long life span or impact on the real life communication of the users.

### **Research Gap**

Previous researches have addressed this topic based on a notion of netspeak being either a foe or a friend with its sustainability being the most important question. Many linguists have worked on it for the past 20 years; however, experts

still are unable to generate a concrete statement about it. The debate is still going on and the current researcher is enthusiastic to resolve this issue.

### **Research Hypothesis**

The researcher conducted the current research with the mindset that even though CMC and netspeak impacts the user's writing skills, yet they are more inclined towards being a friend and might be used to help the new generations in learning the English language.

### **Delimitation and Limitation**

The delimitation of this research was the fact that the questionnaires were filled by two different age groups in order to find out whether the impact of netspeak is age neutral or not. The first group included users in the age range of 15-25 years (intermediate, undergraduate, and postgraduate students), while the second group included users of age 40 years and above. This helped in gathering results from two different generations. Moreover, for both generations only those individuals were involved who maintain their personal accounts on different social media sites and are habitual of using social media daily. Furthermore, for Generation X only those individuals were preferred who were literate enough to have competency in the standard variety of English.

Some limitations were faced in the sub-dimension 'finding age neutrality' for this research. Elements of the generation gap can be observed in every society (no matter how liberal or literate it is). In the Pakistani society, it can be marked by the refinement of language, the fact that it is free from slangs or colloquialisms. We can also refer to it as the "digital generation gap". It can therefore be inferred whether the senior citizens (Generation X) might be using netspeak or not, explaining the whole idea of this research to them was quite challenging.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Glossary**

- I. Code switching: "Code switching is when speaker alternates between two or more languages (or dialects / varieties of a language) in one conversation" (Esen, [2010](#)).
- II. L1: It is the first language of any speaker adopted from their household. It can also be addressed as their native language or mother tongue.
- III. L2: It is the second language learnt by a speaker which is foreign to their surroundings.

IV. Generation X: According to the Pew Research Center, this group of people have their birth years ranging from 1965–1980 (Dimock, [2019](#)). They comprise the age group of 39-54 years.

V. Generation Y: According to the Pew Research Center, this group of people have their birth years ranging from 1981-1996 (Dimock, [2019](#)). They are also referred to as ‘millennials’ and they comprise the age group 23-38 years.

One cannot deny the fact that social media has altogether altered the way we use English language in public domain, for personal communication, and in the academic environment. It is considered as a platform that allows real-time conversation over vast distances. CMC was originally designed to be written but in order to maintain the speed of the spoken discourse the language is so molded that it saves time and prompts productivity where no grammar / language Nazis have the right to police the people.

Initially, the language employed was just a kind of short-cut used by the non-native speakers to express themselves easily. However, it has grown out to be a trend, a symbol of modernism, and a colloquial version of Standard English.

## Netspeak

This budding variety of English can be distinguished as having twelve main linguistic features actively practiced by the internet users.

I. Contractions: This feature is characterized by the shortening of spellings through omitting one or more alphabets in a way that the omitted alphabet is replaced by an apostrophe, for example, *I've* = I have, *didn't* = did not.

II. Linguistic reductions:

a) Linguistic reductions are made on the basis of the prominent phonetic features of the word, eliminating the less prominent ones in order to reduce word length, for example, *Thx*= thanks, *wknd* = weekend.

b) It is also achieved by utilizing only the first half of the word, for example, *uni* = university, *pics* = pictures, *vacay* = vacation.

c) Blended words are reductions made by blending two words together to form one word, for example, *dunno* = don't know, *kinda* = kind of.

III. Numeric reductions: Alphabets are replaced by numbers by matching their phonetic occupancies, for example, *B4* = before, *w8* = weight.

IV. Acronyms: It comprises the initials of a phrase, for example, *IDK* (I don't know), *BTW* (by the way).

V. Special signs

- a) @ (at the rate of): It is used to refer to any place or platform to which something belongs. Originally, it was used within email addresses where it points out the application or social site represented by the given address, for example,...@gmail.com, ...@hotmail.com. Transitionally, on different sites such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook, “@” is used to find or refer to any contact in the phone or in the friend list, for example, “@friends user name”. It is also used for “at” in sentences, for example, I’m @ school.
- b. # (hashtag): Hashtag is used with the keywords associated with the topic so that people can easily find information about it on social media. This feature is quite helpful for the publicity of ideas, content, and products and for conducting online trends or campaigns, for example, #womenempowerment.
- c. \*: The ‘star’ is used to indicate that the word / text is in a corrected form which was mistyped before. which might be mistaken before, for example, *I feel exaustdid* ➔ I feel exhausted\*.
- VI. Spelling exaggerations: It refers to the increase in the number of alphabets (representing sounds in words) in accordance with the time span of word delivery. It also gives a hint of the mood behind it, for example, *ohhh myyyyyyyyyy gooooooodness* for Oh my Goddess (uttered in the state of shock).
- VII. Interjections: It refers to the incorporation of a feeling or reaction in writing, for example, hahaha, ewww, ughh.
- VIII. Improper punctuations and capitalizations: The number of punctuations parallels the strength of emotion, be it shock, emphasis or pause, for example, *What????, rEaLLY??, Woaaah.... Look at that height....*
- IX. Emojis and Emoticons: :- (classic smile), :s (confused smile), 🤔 thinking face, 🤝 victory hand gesture.
- X. Picture posts: The inclusion of pictures in posts provides a convenient way for the transference of emotions / feelings without using many words. Mostly, pictures are used to depict famous gestures or expressions. Post writers reuse the picture and place it in a new scenario that goes well with the pictorial gesture. It is often termed as pictorial meme.



When the examiner almost catches you cheating, so you hit them with the



XI. Roman Urdu: Writing Urdu using English script. It also involves code switching from English to Urdu.

The image shows two tweets side-by-side. The first tweet is from a user (@HalfEngineerR04) and reads: "Other C0untries Y0u are Lo0king So Hands0me / Beautiful Today". The second tweet is from a user (@AliFayezah) and reads: "Hazrat Muhammad SAW never raised his hand on a woman, be it his wife or anyone else. He never cheated, He never used foul language with a woman. Be it anyone. Any woman. So when you tell me "mard esy hi hoty hain" to justify abuse and cheating, no MARD ESY NAHI HOTAY." Both tweets include standard Urdu text within their English-based scripts.

XII. Slang: It is the reflection of one's culture.

- Urdu slang: *golibaaz* (someone unreliable or not trustworthy), *jugaadh lagana* (a solution that violates the rules).
- English slangs: I'm dead (that was amusing), airhead (dumb person).

### Rise of Deviation in the Standard Variety

Some experts consider netspeak to be a kind of “interlanguage” created through code switching between L1 and L2, also termed as the impact of the mother tongue.

#### *Selinker's Interlanguage Theory*

The argument can be better understood with the help of Selinker's interlanguage theory. “The theory of interlanguage depicts an emergence of a linguistic system developed by a second language learner who has not achieved full competence and proficiency in the target language. This is the stage whereby some major features of L1 are still being preserved and employed in the use of L2, thus distorting a learner's ability to naturally understand and employ the rules of the target language due to a great level of confusion and language overgeneralization. In other words, Interlanguage occurs when certain aspects of the target language do not match with a learner's existing language structure developed through his first language learning experience” (Azianura Hani Shaari, 2015).

#### *William O'Grady's and John Archibald's Concept of Interlanguage*

William O'Grady and John Archibald, in chapter eleven (Second Language Acquisition) of their book “Review of O'Grady et al., Contemporary Linguistics”, explained the concept using the following figure.

**Figure 1**

*William O'Grady's and John Archibald's Concept of Interlanguage*

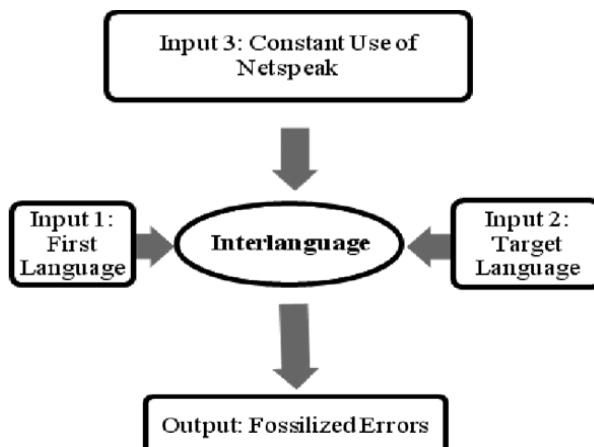


### ***Netspeak Leading to the Fossilization of Errors***

The impact of netspeak on the language of L2 learners generates another type of interlangauge. *Azianura Hani Shaari and Khaleel Bader Bataineh* in their research paper “Netspeak and a Breach of Formality: Informalization and Fossilization of Errors in Writing among ESL and EFL Learners” ([Shaari, 2015](#)), illustrated the following figure:

**Figure 2**

*Netspeak Leading to the Fossilization of Errors*



Marta Baralo (1994) proposed in his study “Errors and fossilization”, as cited by Lic. Venecia Tejada Reyes, “fossilization is the mechanism by which a speaker tends to keep in its interlanguage certain items, rules and linguistic subsystems of its mother tongue in relation to a given object language. If in the interlanguage used by the student errors appear that could not exist in the learning stage in which it is found and that, supposedly, should have been overcome previously, it can be characterized as fossilized errors” ([Reyes, 2019](#)). Another explanation could be given as follows: “the relatively permanent incorporation of incorrect linguistic

forms into the competence of the second language of a person has been called fossilization" (Brown, [2000](#)).

It is evident that the greater circle indulged in social media activities is the outer circle (Kachru's three circles of language use) comprising the users located in the developing world (Jimma, [2017](#)). They use English as a second language mostly in formal, academic, business and government domains. However, code switching between the first and second languages can be unconsciously mixed, thus contributing to the emergence of a new variety of English reflecting the features of the mother tongue. Singlish or Pakistani English are two such varieties of English. The emergence of Pakistani English has led to the inclusion of many Urdu words in the English language, while some words have been officially added into the English language dictionaries, for example, *loot, pashmina, thug, lathi charge, etc.*

### **Fairclough's Idea of Informalization**

The subsistence of netspeak was feared by Norman Fairclough. He suggested that the boundaries between language forms ideally reserved for intimate relationships / conversations and those reserved for more formal situations are becoming vague. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a significant rise in this trend which became intense in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Fairclough's idea of "informalization" predicted that "the shifts of speech towards writing may have had their heyday; contemporary cultural values place a high valuation on informality, and the predominant shift is towards speech-like forms in writing" (Fairclough, [1992](#)). He firmly believed that the upcoming technological era would amalgamate formal and informal features of languages which include "technical and non-technical vocabularies, markers of authority and familiarity, more typically written, and more typically spoken syntactic forms" (Fairclough, [1992](#)). Some previous studies held a "casual attitude towards linguistic consistency" (Baron, [2000](#)) responsible for the fossilization of errors, that is, permanent inclusion of incorrect linguistics features in a person's written and spoken discourse; eventually resulting into 'informalization' in both formal and informal writings.

### **Impact of Netspeak (Positive / Negative)**

Another important /aspect of this research is to find out the positive or negative impact of netspeak on the users' writing skills, which is an ongoing debate. According to most experts, the use of netspeak is preventing the youth from following formal language rules. Even if they are made to learn and follow the structural rules of a language, they might not be able to do so because of the addiction to netspeak; however, throughout the world, mixed opinions can be heard

about it. According to the previous researches, some define netspeak as “the bastardization of language”, or “the lingua franca of the Internet”, or “the native language of netizens” (Jovanovic, [2013](#)). The study “How Does the Use of Modern Communication Technology Influence Language and Literacy Development? A Review” (Watt, [2010](#)) states that one of the reasons for the ambiguity found in this dimension is the existence of the “digital generation gap”, that is, the difference in the level of awareness and exposure to internet sites and their dissimilar use between parents and children. There is a need to find solid proofs to draw any particular conclusion. Should. If the results point towards a negative evolutionary impact of technology on children, then acknowledging this issue is essential in order to support parents in defending their children’s development. Otherwise, the government should take steps to provide this educational resource of communication technology to all.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Type**

This is a quantitative research.

### **Population**

The target population for this research was divided into two groups. The first group comprised intermediate, undergraduate, and postgraduate students who were 15-25 years of age. The second group comprised internet users who were aged 40 years or above. This grouping corresponds to the division of the target population into two generations, X and Y, albeit inversely. The researcher wanted to collect generic responses without any class barrier as the social media craze engulfs both the upper class and the middle class. Thus, the institutes that cater to a mixed / diverse population were selected. Student population was selected from the Kips College, GCU, Shalimar Medical College and Kinnaird College for Women. For the selection of the target population included in the second group, the researcher did not keep any strings attached. It could be the faculty of any educational institute, other professional/ retired citizens or even housewives, well aware of the Standard English and using social media. Thus, this group incorporated the faculty of GCU, Kinnaird, Shalimar Degree College, as well as the parents of the fellow KC-ites.

### **Research Tool**

This research was carried out using a questionnaire that was designed to know whether netspeak impacts the user’s formal writing skills or not. If yes, then what kind of impact it generates, positive or negative. Moreover, it was also intended to evaluate this impact in terms of its sustainability.

## **Sample Size**

Sample size was 150 internet users including 100 users from the first group (Generation Y) and 50 users from the second group (Generation X).

## **Sampling Type**

The research was conducted via random sampling.

## **Questionnaire**

The designed questionnaire consists of twenty-five questions based on the following five aspects of this research.

### **1. Prime Causative Factors in the Development of Netspeak**

- I. Do you use the purest form of your mother tongue? If no, to what extent usage of your mother tongue with its local slang is a constraint giving rise to the impurity of language? *Very little, to a medium / considerable extent, very high.*
- II. To what extent code switching (switching between Urdu and English) exists in your spoken language? *Very little, to a medium / considerable extent, very high.*
- III. How easy is it for you to switch between netspeak (while using social sites) and the standard variety (for academic / formal writing)? *Very easy, moderately easy, difficult.*

### **2. Impact of Netspeak on the User's Writing Skills**

- I. How much time do you spend on social sites on a daily basis? *2-3 hours, 4-5 hours, above.*
- II. Do you think that the use of netspeak has become a trend and is more than a need? *Yes, no.*
- III. Have you ever utilized the features of netspeak (informal and contracted language) while making class notes or assignments? *Unconsciously yes, consciously yes, no.*
- IV. How easy is it for you to switch between netspeak (while using social media sites) and the standard variety (for academic / formal writing)? *Very easy, moderately easy, difficult.*

### **3. The Nature of the Impact**

- I. Do you purposely contract the words or use acronyms / short forms to save time? *Yes, no.*

- II. What is your reason of using netspeak? *Lack of knowledge of Standard English, to follow the trend, for your ease.*
- III. Do you think that the autocorrect feature and the speed of typing in written chats has affected your knowledge of spellings? *Positively yes, negatively yes, no.*
- IV. In what scenarios do you prefer to use the autocorrect feature? *Unaware of certain spellings, fast replies, do not use it.*
- V. Do you think that the excessive use of Roman English or Urdu slang in online comments / posts limits the readings to a narrow circle? *Yes, no.*
- VI. Imagine that you want to raise your voice to highlight an issue (for example, the Kashmir shutdown) on a worldwide scale, which form of language would you prefer? *Pure Standard English, Roman Urdu / English with Urdu slangs, English with spelling contractions / English slang.*
- VII. Do you use the same type of language while writing a post and while commenting on a post? *Yes, no.*
- VIII. Do you think that netspeak helps in the better portrayal of emotions compared with the standard variety? *Yes, no.*

#### **4. The Impact being Age-neutral**

- I. At what age you started using social media sites? *Teenage, twenties, above.*
- II. What form of language do you prefer while using the internet? *Standard English, netspeak, Urdu (script).*
- III. Do you feel the need of the knowledge of the standard variety of English while using social sites? *Yes, no, to some extent.*
- IV. To what extent is your awareness of language modifications (spelling short forms, acronyms,) evident on the internet? *Very less, average, high.*
- V. Do you follow grammatical rules while writing on social sites? *Always, most of the time, never.*
- VI. Have you increased the use of netspeak over time while writing on social sites? *Yes, no.*
- VII. Do you think that your posts look more attractive due to the use of emoticons and contractions? *Yes, no.*
- VIII. Do you think that the use of netspeak should be discontinued? *Yes, no.*
- IX. If no, state your reason of using it.

#### **5. Sustainability**

On the basis of the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire, the sustainability of netspeak is determined and discussed below.

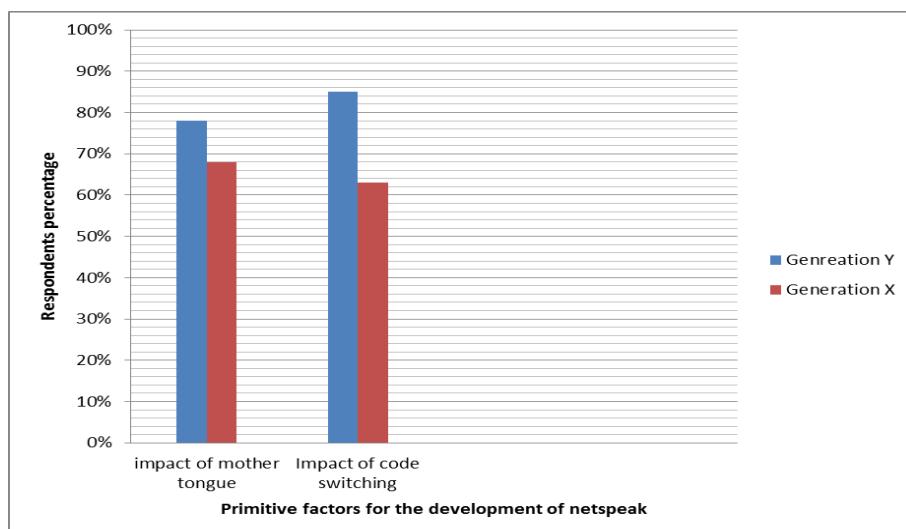
## Discussion

### Prime Causative Factors in the Development of Netspeak

As discussed in literature review, the prime cause of the emergence of this new variety of English is the use of one's mother tongue, where the linguistic framework of L1 dominates and has a directive role in the formation of the linguistic framework of L2 within the mind (Selinker's interlanguage theory). It can be said that the features and patterns of use of L1 tend to replicate themselves for L2 as well. The globalization of the world has led to the creation of varieties of every sort of language (be it English, Urdu, Hindi, etc.) in order to attain adequate competency for communication in that language by the non-native speakers living within the broader community. Moreover, the continuous interaction of the non-native speakers with the native speakers has accelerated the spread of these new varieties among them as well, leading to impurity in their use of mother tongue. For example, the people of Pakistan speak multiple regional languages while Urdu is the national language, when it gets adopted by the people belonging to different linguistic regions, their language makeup shows variance in terms of Urdu. Moreover, for it to be used by people having different literacy levels, its simpler / impure version has been adopted across the region. This is the reason why 78% and 68% of the respondents from the Y and X generations respectively used an impure version of their mother tongue.

**Figure 3**

*Prime Causative Factors for the Development of Netspeak*

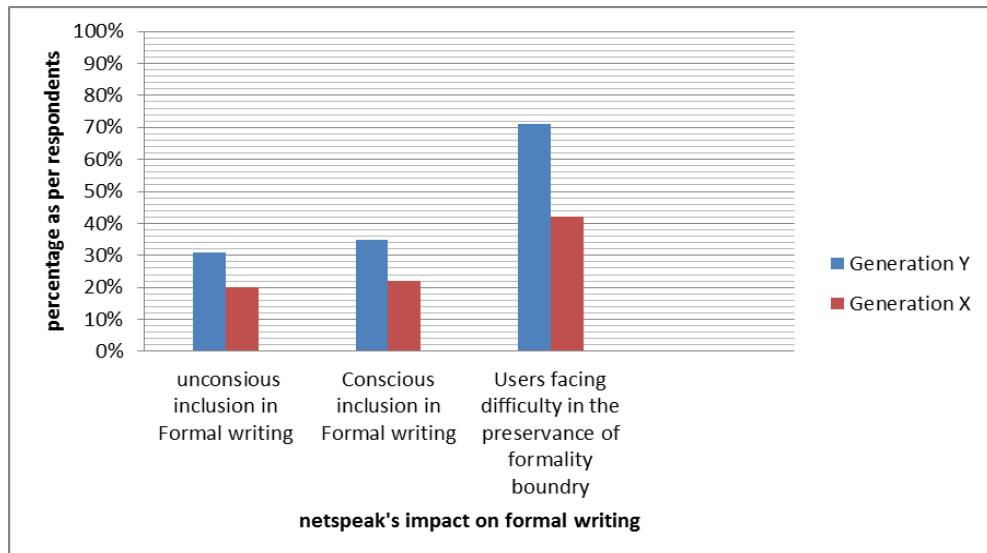


Another causative factor is code switching, a linguistic practice quite common in bi/multilingual communities, for example, switching between Urdu and English or Urdu and any regional language (in the Pakistani context). It is so prevalent that it has now become a part of the speakers linguistic repertoire. According to the data collected, 85% of Generation Y and 63% of Generation X respondents code switched to a minor yet considerable extent in their linguistic routine.

Replicating both of the above factors for L2 (English) gives rise to a certain sort of impurity / informality; whereas, the boundary between its pure and impure form is getting blurred due to constant switching. This line of argument can be proved through the collected data which shows that almost 71% of youth are struggling to maintain this boundary. Thus, it can be said that these two factors are the prime causes of deviation seen in the use of the standard variety of English while generating a new one simultaneously.

### **Impact of Netspeak on User's Writing Skills**

With the rapid development of the electronic world, its membership circumference is increasing with every passing day contributing to the immense popularity of netspeak. Earlier, netspeak was described as the need of the hour for breaking the communication boundary, while aiding non-English speakers. Now, it has evolved to be a trend, as per 86% of Generation Y and 88% of Generation X respondents. Such popularity comes with the power that surely impacts the formal writing skills of the users. As per the survey, 54% millennials spend 4-5 hours and above on social media on a daily basis. It definitely implies a switch to the informal variety (netspeak) where formal writing roles are abandoned. Such an extensive and constant rate of exposure to netspeak surely leaves an impact on the mind of the users, making it difficult for them to switch back to the formal variety. This contributes to blurring the boundary between the formal and informal variety, making the features of the informal variety traverse to the formal environment. The survey conducted shows that 31% of Generation Y and 20% of Generation X respondents unconsciously included features of netspeak in their formal writing; whereas, its conscious incorporation by 35% of Generation Y and 22% of Generation X respondents was intended to save time or was done under the push of habit. Under such circumstances, 71% of youngsters and 42% of the senior population admitted to the difficulties faced in maintaining the boundary between the two varieties.

**Figure 4***Impact of Netspeak on Formal Writing of Generation Y and Generation X*

### Nature of the Impact

The impact of electronic world and electronic variety on formal writing skills is a reality; however, in order to understand the nature of the impact the researchers need to ponder upon the reasons stated by the respondents for using netspeak. The progressive world has minimized the distance between human beings through high-speed technology, leaving no space for dawdling. This has made our lives more like a race where everyone wants to compete with time. Catering the need of the era, where electronic world provides a medium for global interaction, netspeak provides a chance to accelerate the conversational speed. This is the reason that 74% and 64% respondents of Generation Y and Generation X respectively accepted the fact that they contract words in order to save time and to have a quicker and more productive conversation. Another stated reason is the ease and comfort it provides during conversation (68% Y, 70% X). Other reasons include being more expressive and allowing better portrayal of emotions (60% Y, 60% X). Adding more to it, some respondents (13% Y, 8% X) preferred to describe netspeak as a need in the absence of the knowledge of the standard variety; furthermore, some were attracted towards it just to keep up with the modern trend (19% Y, 22% X). Overall, the reasons stated above depict the handiness of netspeak in catering the different needs of the users in order to smoothly utilize the inventions of the electronic world; thus, fulfilling the duty of an effective pidgin language. Despite the immense

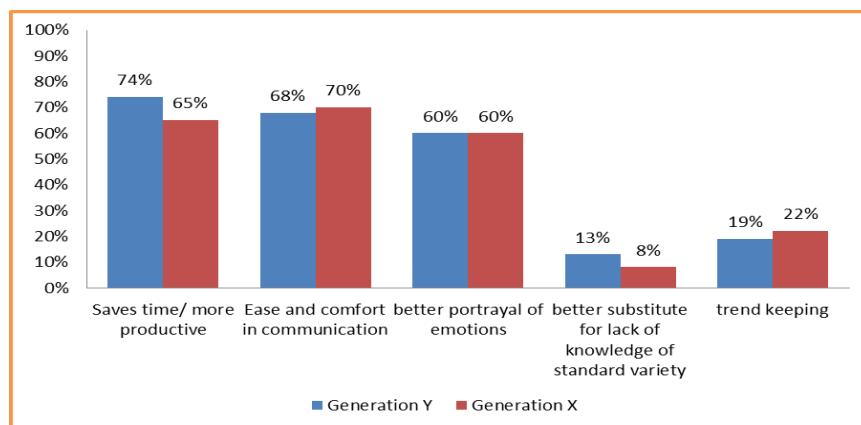
technological advantage, some previous researches have highlighted the concerns of experts and parents regarding the negative impact of this computer mediated environment on the linguistic makeup of children, restraining them from following formal language rules. Moreover, for them, its use is restricted to entertainment only and is not intended for educational purposes. Contrary to it, the survey showed that 80-90% of the respondents from both generations claimed that social media has contributed to their linguistic knowledge one way or the other. A thorough investigation of different social media sites made the current researcher come across different pages designed solely for language acquisition using some fun, non-traditional methods that cater every type of learner, such as *englishpix*, *BBC learning English*, *leaning.english.1*, etc. It is therefore said, "Technology offers new ways for practicing language and assessing performance" (Hockly, [2009](#)). The modern era focuses intensely on different needs of the students and their preferred learning styles as per their psychological makeup. Classrooms therefore have also evolved to be more student-centered by incorporating different teaching methodologies using audiovisual aid, realia, interactive discussions, and group activities. This is not limited merely to language learning; in fact, these sites incorporate every sort of learning including different life skills, business techniques and ideas, and even provide an amazing way of gaining scientific knowledge. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that social media is the most fulfilling and distinctive institute for learning anything and everything. Moreover, electronic developers have not only given a writing platform but have also provided a helping hand to the users in the form of some features, such as the auto-correct feature which is a tool that assists the users' in different ways to write. Half of the millennials and nearly half of Generation X respondents highlighted its positive impact on their writing, either in the form of generating fast replies (57% Y, 50% X) or by providing spelling awareness (24% Y, 24% X). As per Marconi Kamal, "communication is the best of all ways for teaching vocabulary and we can easily understand that through the communication of social media, students learn faster than paper-based learning" (Kamal, [2013](#)).

An important point highlighted in this research is the distinctiveness found in this new (budding) variety of English based on the region of its use and the mother tongue of its users. For example, netspeak that evolved in the native English speaking countries contains slang and proverbs representing their culture, whereas in case of non-native countries where English is spoken as a second or foreign language such as Pakistan, Urdu words, Roman Urdu, slang and proverbs belonging to its culture were evident. In this way, although the primary contractions and reductions of English vocabulary remain identical, other linguistic features may

vary. This may result in restricting the readings on posts or on any other social writings, generating some sort of a linguistic boundary. This fact has been affirmed by 63% of Generation Y and 72% of Generation X respondents. This is the reason that the respondents of both generations preferred Standard English in scenarios such as highlighting any social issue across the globe in order to record readings on an extensive scale. Contrastively, populations within their corresponding circle sharing similar cultural practices and traditions, for example, neighboring countries of South Asia or Europe still prefer netspeak in terms of expression and effective communication.

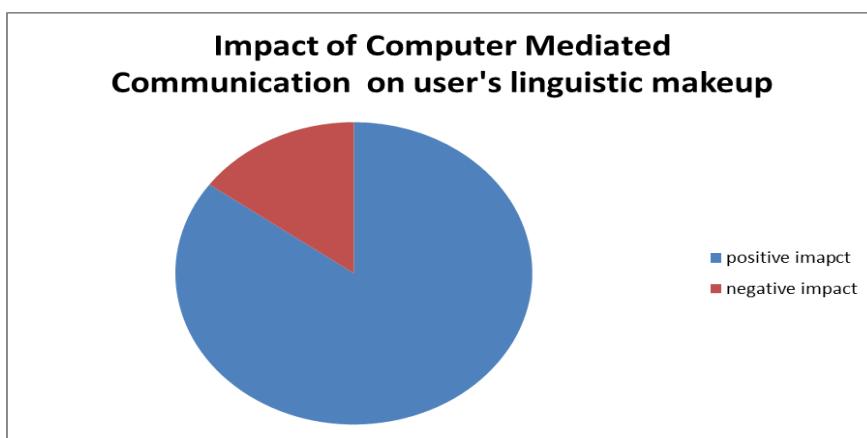
**Figure 5**

*Reasons for using Netspeak by Generation Y and Generation X*



**Figure 6**

*Impact of CMC on the User's Linguistic Makeup*



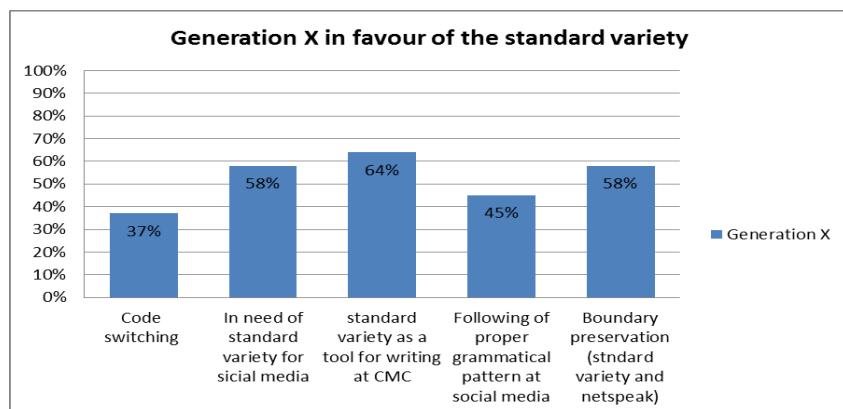
## **Impact being Age-neutral**

The sustainability factor and the evolution of netspeak towards a new variety greatly depends on its acceptance by the co-existing generations (Generation X and Y) of the current era. Moreover, whether or not netspeak makes a similar impact on the formal writing of Generation X remains an important point to ponder. Through the survey, the researchers observed that Generation X is rather more conscious of the kind of language they use in terms of its purity. This is the reason that 37% of the respondents representing Generation X completely refrained from code switching in a conversation. Instead, they selected the language of communication beforehand and tended to maintain it throughout the conversation; whereas of them code switched to a minor extent (in their spoken language) regretfully. The preference of Generation X is always the Standard English variety, as for them it is a serious and dignified version of language which is used for communication. This is the reason that 58% of the population representing Generation X felt the need of the standard variety while using social media; whereas, for 64% the standard variety was the preferred variety to write on social media sites. Moreover, 30%- 60% of them followed the proper grammatical pattern, as compared to 42% of millennials who never followed it. On the other hand, the awareness and comprehension level of netspeak was quite comforting for about 66% of the population representing Generation X. Almost 60% of respondents belonging to this generation admitted an increase in the amount of the use of netspeak, mainly in the form of contracting words to save time and using emoticons which are absolutely loved by this generation. According to these respondents, netspeak is surely an easy escape for those who lack the knowledge of the standard variety and it allows better expression of emotions especially through the visual features it offers, such as emojis, emoticons or picture posts. About 88% of them considered it to be a trend, while 22% strived to adopt this trend in order to diminish the digital generation gap. From a wider perspective, Generation X was not found reluctant towards using the electronic world and its features and almost 86% of them claimed that social media has served to increase their knowledge more or less by using interesting (non-traditional) methodologies. Almost half of the population representing Generation X (46%) affirmed the use of the “auto-correct” feature in a positive way for generating fast replies and for figuring out unknown spellings. Stating it as the feature of “the progressive world”, half of the population belonging to Generation X negated the idea of the discontinuation of netspeak. A deeper analysis showed that this generation is quite open-minded towards the new variety; however, they have managed to keep both the varieties entirely separate, thus preventing netspeak to affect their formal writing skills. The collected data stated that 58% of the

Generation X respondents never included the features of netspeak in their formal writing and for them it is fairly easy to segregate both the varieties. This can be understood from the fact that 95% of the population representing Generation X started using the internet and other social media sites after the age of 30 or 35. They have spent a considerable amount of time using the standard variety and even now their preference lies with it. Their knowledge of netspeak is confined to a comprehensible level where they try and guess the meaning of these contractions and reductions, but in terms of usage a prominent part of the population still prefers the standard variety.

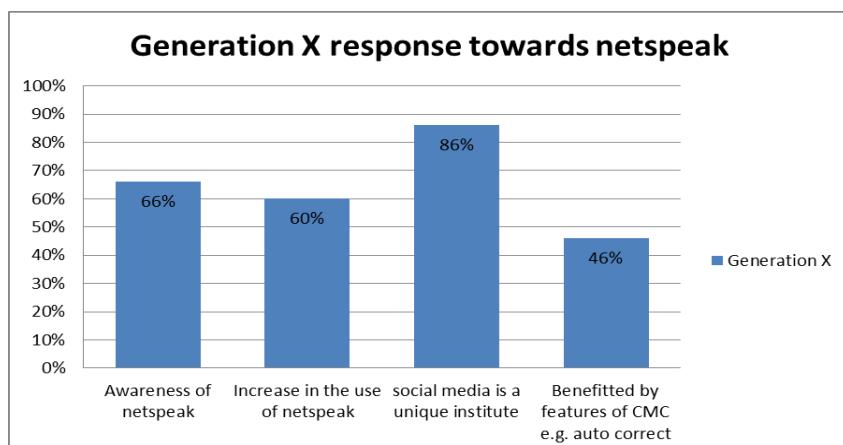
**Figure 7**

*Response of Generation X towards the Standard Variety*



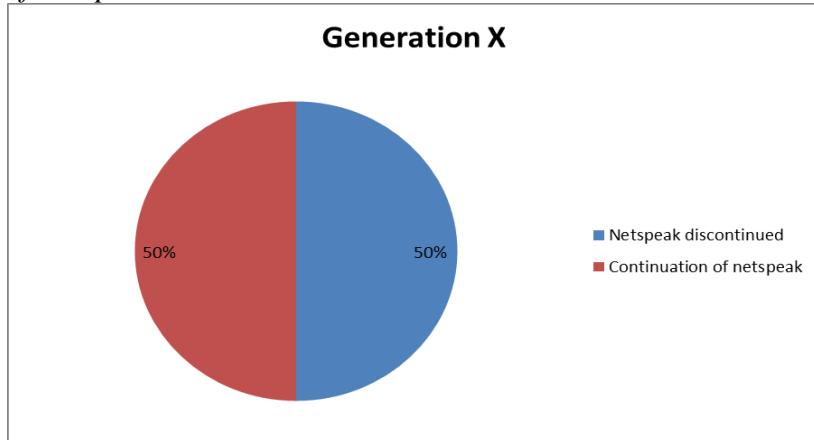
**Figure 8**

*Response of Generation X towards Netspeak*



**Figure 9**

*The Perspective of Generation X Regarding the Discontinuation of Netspeak*



### Sustainability

From the above discussion, we can draw upon the sustainability scale of netspeak while stating that whether in the form of a trend, an easy tool for writing, a convenient reflector of emotions or a gadget used to save time, both generations have accepted the existence of netspeak despite varying in its usage. From enjoying a privileged status among the millennials to being labelled as a new tool of the progressive world by Generation X, netspeak has strengthened its roots.

Generically, a language dies when it loses its popularity or when its users and the platform of its use loses power; whereas, in this case, neither social media is losing power nor the social media users. In fact, 60% of the respondents from both generations claimed an increase in its use with time. This provides netspeak a higher rank at the scale of sustainability.

### Conclusion

The current research showed that electronic world surely has its impact on people's lives in the form of its own linguistic "variety". It has never failed to excite and influence its users. Although it is not on the verge of completely overpowering the standard variety, yet it has gone a considerable way in this regard. In other words the digital world and its variety has made an altogether separate route for itself surely strong enough to captivate people, making them blindly follow its lead. With technological advancement and digitalization of almost everything, netspeak has proved to be a much handy tool for browsing the virtual space (the social media)

for different purposes. It would not be surprising anymore to see CMC being used for pedagogical purposes at some time in the future, that is, for learning languages or teaching skills. In terms of age neutrality, the senior generation is surely giving it a tough time by resisting its impact on their formal writing, but it is for sure that netspeak is a variety born to live whether it is liked or disliked.

## References

- Baralo, M. (1994). *Errors and fossilization*. Madrid: Antonio de Nebrija Foundation.
- Baron, N. S. (2010). *Always on: Language in an online and mobile world*. Oxford University Press.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (Vol. 4). New York: Longman.
- Crystal, D. (2002). Language and the Internet. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 45(2), 142-144. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2002.1003702>
- Dimock, M. (2019). Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. *Pew Research Center*, 17(1), 1-7.
- Esen, S. (2010). *Code Switching: Definition, Types, and Examples*. Owlcation.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change* (Vol. 10). Cambridge: Polity press.
- Hockly, G. D. (2009). *How to teach English with Technology*. Pearson Longman.
- Jimma, J. D. (2017). *Language of social media* (Doctoral dissertation). Ritgerðir með leiðbeinandann 'Erlendína Kristjánsson.
- Jovanovic, D. (2013). *A qualitative study of the use f netspeak in english langauge classroom: Implementation of net speak in high school and university language teaching* [Master's thesis]. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:ula-201312161383>
- Kamal, M. (2013). *Student's authority in selecting material to learn vocabulary*. Cambridge University Press.
- O'Connor, A. (2005). *Instant Messaging:Friend or Foe of student writing?* New Horizons for Learning.
- O'Grady, William, Archibald, J., Aronoff, M., & Rees-Miller, J. (Eds.). (2001). Second Language Acquisition. In *Review: O'Grady et al, Contemporary Linguistics*, (4th ed. Bedford/St. Publisher. <https://linguistlist.org/issues/12/12-2355/#1>

- Reyes, L. V. (2019). *Fossilization Error of High School Students in the Acquisition of a Foreign Language*. Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: The Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo.
- Shaari, A. H., & Bataineh, K. B. (2015). Netspeak and a Breach of Formality: Informalization and Fossilization of Errors in Writing among ESL and EFL Learners. *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education*, 6(2), 1-10.
- Shaughnessy, M. (2008). An interview with Jacquie Ream: What's happening with writing? *Education News*, 6. 1-5.
- Stavfeldt, E. (2011). *Friend or Foe? Netspeak in English Language Teaching*. Department of languages and literatures, University of Gothenburg. <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/25876>
- Thangaraj, S. R., & Maniam, M. (2015). The Influence of Netspeak on students' writing. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(1), 45-52.
- Watt, H. J. (2010). How does the use of modern communication technology influence language and literacy development? A review. *Contemporary Issues in Communication Science and Disorders*, 37(Fall), 141-148. [https://pubs.asha.org/doi/pdf/10.1044/cicsd\\_36\\_F\\_141](https://pubs.asha.org/doi/pdf/10.1044/cicsd_36_F_141)
- Zinkhan, G. M., Kwak, H., Morrison, M., & Peters, C. O. (2003). Web-based chatting: Consumer communication in cyberspace. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13(1-2), 17-27. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327663JCP13-1&2\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327663JCP13-1&2_02)